

## Coös County's Class of 2009 Where Are They Now?

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The Coös Youth Study is a ten-year panel study following the course of young people's lives and the choices they make regarding education, work, and family as they transition to adulthood in a rural New England county facing serious economic challenges. When the study's first survey was conducted in 2008, the older of the study's two cohorts—the cohort that is the focus of this brief—was in the eleventh grade, and they were surveyed again a year later in 2009 as high school seniors. In 2011, they were contacted to take the study's first follow-up survey conducted after participants left high school. Follow-up data were collected for 234 of the 398 (59 percent) youth who had participated in the 2008 and/or 2009 surveys. Sixty-three percent of follow-up participants are female, and 37 percent are male.<sup>1</sup> The average age of participants is 19.7 years. The main racial or ethnic background of 97 percent of participants is Caucasian/white.

### Residence

Slightly under half of survey participants (49 percent) reside in Coös County the majority of the time. A large majority of participants living outside Coös County (81 percent) report attending school full time. It is not yet known if these participants intend to return to Coös County when they complete college; we will learn about this decision making process in future follow-ups. However, participants were asked where they plan to live most of the time in the next year, and the difference between where participants live now and where they plan to live next year is significant.<sup>2</sup> Seven percent of participants plan to move from Coös to a different New Hampshire county, and another 7 percent plan to move from Coös to outside New Hampshire in the next year (see Figure 1). Nevertheless, wherever they currently reside, a large majority of participants (84 percent) plan to stay where they are.

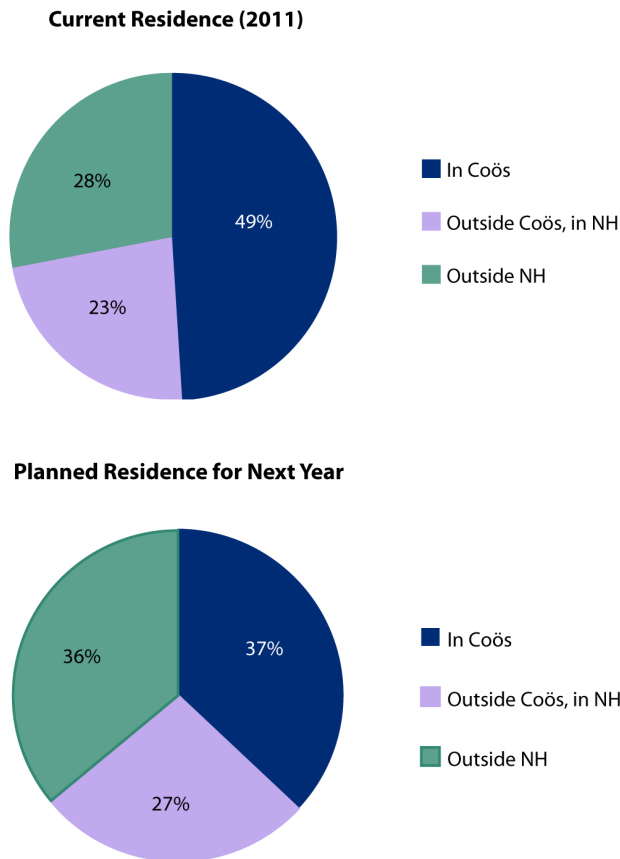
Regarding their type of residence, 39 percent of participants report living in their parents' homes, 30 percent in dorms, and 23 percent in rentals. The remainder reports

### Key Findings

- Approximately half of the Coös County Class of 2009's follow-up survey participants (49 percent) are living in Coös County the majority of the time. Of those living outside Coös County, 81 percent are attending school full time.
- The most frequently reported combinations of school and work situations were in school full time, working part time (41 percent), followed by in school full time, not employed (19 percent).
- Compared with a national sample, a higher percentage of Coös County Class of 2009 follow-up survey participants who are in school full time are also working part time or full time.
- The percentage of participants reporting that it is easy for people their age to find a job in Coös County has declined significantly since they were first surveyed as eleventh graders, from 67 percent in 2008, to 39 percent in 2009, and down to 19 percent in 2011.
- Ninety-five percent and 94 percent, respectively, rate having a steady or secure job and a having successful career as highly important. Seventy-six percent rate leaving Coös County as highly or moderately important; however, 93 percent also report living close to family as highly or moderately important, suggesting conflicted priorities.

owning a house or condo (2 percent) or 'other' (6 percent). Overall, one quarter of participants report that they consider themselves highly financially independent, and participants who are renting reported high financial independence at approximately three times the rate of those who are living with their parents or in dorms.

**FIGURE 1. WHERE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS WERE CURRENTLY LIVING MOST OF THE TIME (TOP) COMPARED WITH WHERE THEY PLANNED TO LIVE MOST OF THE TIME IN THE NEXT YEAR (BOTTOM)**

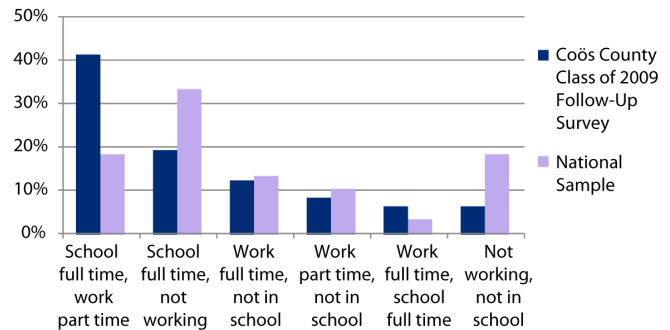


Note: Based on 231 participant responses.

## Work and School

Participants were asked to report if they were employed full time, part time, or not at all, and if they were in school full time, part time, or not at all.<sup>3</sup> The responses to these two questions were combined in Figure 2, which displays the percentages for the six most frequently reported combinations of employment and school situations among Coös Youth Study Class of 2009 survey participants compared with a national sample of 19- and 20-year-olds.<sup>4</sup> The most frequently reported combination among Coös Youth Study participants is school full time, work part time (41 percent), followed at some distance by school full time, not employed (19 percent). Six percent are neither working nor in school, and another 8 percent

**FIGURE 2. SIX MOST FREQUENT WORK AND SCHOOL SITUATIONS FROM THE COÖS COUNTY CLASS OF 2009 FOLLOW-UP SURVEY COMPARED WITH A NATIONAL SAMPLE OF 19- AND 20-YEAR-OLDS**



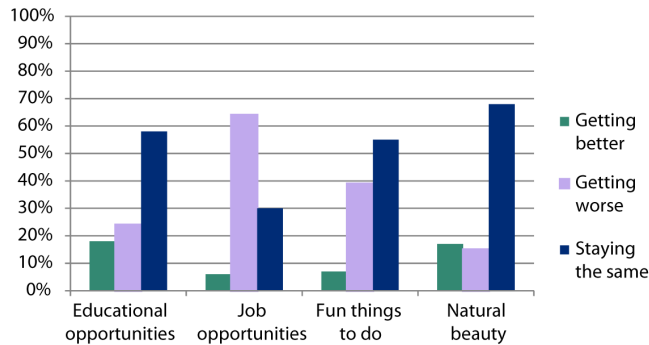
Note: Based on 233 participant responses and a national comparison sample of 5,101.

are working part time and not in school. It is important to note that participants who in 2009 reported higher likelihood that they would finish college in the future were significantly more likely to participate in the 2011 follow-up.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, these findings may not be representative of the entire Class of 2009. Of the 172 participants in school part time or full time, 67 percent are attending four-year colleges, and 30 percent are attending community colleges.

Overall, 66 percent of the Coös Youth Study survey participants and 54 percent of the national sample attend school full time. There may be many factors contributing to education and employment trends among 19- and 20-year-olds in Coös County and across the country, and the difference between Coös youth and this nationally representative sample may be a result of the greater likelihood of college-bound Coös Youth Study participants to complete follow-up surveys. Nevertheless, compared with the national sample, it appears that a greater percentage of Coös Youth Study survey participants who attend school full time are also working. More than twice the percentage of Coös Youth Study survey participants are in school full time and working part time (41 percent) than in the national sample (18 percent), and twice the percentage are in school full time and working full time (6 percent) than in the national sample (3 percent); in the national sample, 33 percent are in school full time and not working, compared with 19 percent of Coös Youth Study survey participants. Furthermore, the percentage of Coös Youth Study survey participants who are neither working nor in school (6 percent) is one-third the percentage of that in the national sample (18 percent). The total percentage that is in school part time, regardless of work status, is between 6 to 8 percent for both groups.

Despite the relatively low unemployment rate in our sample, the percentage of participants who report that it is easy for people their age to find a job in Coös County has declined significantly since they were eleventh graders in 2008,<sup>6</sup> from 67 percent down to 19 percent in the most recent survey.<sup>7</sup> The closing of the paper mills in Berlin, Gorham, and Groveton that were the area’s largest employers, coupled with the current nationwide recession, contributed to an increase of the county’s annual unemployment rate from 5.2 percent in 2008 to 7.6 percent in 2011.<sup>8</sup> Sixteen percent of participants report that one of their parents was fired or laid off from work in the past year. Asked about four issues in Coös County, only for job opportunities did the majority (64 percent) report the issue as getting worse. Natural beauty is the feature of Coös County that the highest percentage of participants (85 percent) assessed as staying the same or getting better (see Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3. ACCORDING TO THE CLASS OF 2009, GETTING BETTER, GETTING WORSE, OR STAYING THE SAME IN COÖS COUNTY?**



Note: Based on 232 participant responses.

## Goals for the Future

As seen in Table 1, having a steady or secure job and a successful career are rated as highly important<sup>9</sup> by the most participants (95 percent and 94 percent, respectively), followed by finishing college (83 percent). Participants’ outlooks on job opportunities in Coös County, seen in Figure 3, are a troublesome sign that it may prove difficult to retain youth in the region in the future. Seventy-six percent rate leaving Coös County as highly or moderately important. However, 94 percent also report living close to family as highly or moderately important. These data suggest that participants may have conflicting objectives, but most prioritize finding stable work over other concerns at this stage in their lives.

**TABLE 1. IMPORTANCE OF OBJECTIVES**

|                             | High Importance | Moderate Importance | Low Importance |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Have a steady or secure job | 95%             | 4%                  | 1%             |
| Have a successful career    | 94%             | 5%                  | 1%             |
| Finish college              | 83%             | 15%                 | 3%             |
| Have children               | 59%             | 30%                 | 11%            |
| Live close to your family   | 36%             | 57%                 | 7%             |
| Leave Coös County           | 27%             | 49%                 | 24%            |

Note: Based on 230 participant responses; totals may exceed 100 percent due to rounding.

Look for upcoming Carsey briefs for more in-depth analyses of these and other findings from the 2011 Coös Youth Study survey.

## REFERENCES

S. Galea and M. Tracy, “Participation rates in epidemiological studies,” *Annals of Epidemiology*, 17(9) (2007), 643-653.  
 M. Henderson et al., “Retaining young people in a longitudinal sexual health survey: A trial of strategies to maintain participation,” *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 10(9) (2010).

## ENDNOTES

1. Female participants were significantly more likely to participate in the follow-up survey than male participants (n = 398,  $\chi^2[1] = 30.396$ , p = .000). This is not unusual in survey research; see e.g. Galea & Tracy, 2007 and Henderson, Wight, Nixon & Hart, 2010.
2. Chi-square test results: n = 231,  $\chi^2[4] = 273.103$ , p = .000.
3. “School” includes community colleges, four-year colleges, and vocational programs.
4. Source: Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Current Population Survey (2011). All data are weighted.
5. Chi-square test results: n = 329,  $\chi^2[2] = 17.889$ , p = .000.
6. Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) test results: n = 181, Wilks’ Lambda[2] = .585, F = 63.432, p = .000.
7. This question was asked slightly differently at these three points in time: 2008, “Do you think you could easily find a job (or another job if you already have one) in your community?”; 2009, “Is it easy for people your age to find a job in your community?”; and 2011, “Is it easy for people your age to find a job in Coös County?”. This last change was to ensure that participants living outside Coös County were still responding to the question with Coös County in mind and not their current place of residence.
8. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Available at <http://www.bls.gov/lau/data.htm>.
9. Participants responded on a 0-6 scale from ‘not at all important’ to ‘very important.’ This scale was collapsed to 0-1 ‘low importance,’ 2-4 ‘moderate importance,’ and 5-6 ‘high importance.’

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